DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 148 720 SO 010 650

AUTHOR Engle, Shirley H.
TITLE The Search for a More Adequate Definition of Citizenship Education.
PUB DATE Nov 77
NOTE 32p.; Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies (Cincinnati, Ohio, November 23-26, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Citizenship; Citizenship Responsibility; Course Content; Critical Thinking; Decision Making; Democratic Values; *Educational Objectives; Educational Philosophy; *Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; Political Attitudes; Problem Solving; Productive Thinking; *Relevance (Education); Socialization; Social Problems; Social Sciences; *Social Studies; Student Attitudes

ABSTRACT

The paper analyzes the multifaceted nature of current citizenship education programs and suggests a model which would reconcile the differences between conflicting program approaches. One problem of citizenship education is lack of consensus on its goals and content. Some programs emphasize socialization to established rules of social and political behavior; other programs emphasize critical thinking and questioning of traditional standards of behavior and values. An explanation for this confusion may be that educators have not sufficiently analyzed the alternative teaching approaches in relation to the needs of our society. Educators must realize that our society is experiencing great difficulties in achieving true democracy and capitalism. It is hypocritical for schools to try to instill citizenship by teaching about our society as a model of perfection. Another problem in clarifying the nature of citizenship education arises when educators equate social studies education with the study of social sciences. High school textbooks oversimplify the social sciences. Also, the questions which students must deal with in real life are far more complex than the theoretical ones which social scientists explore. The author suggests a model of social criticism as the basis of citizenship programs which would be value directed, problem oriented, and objective. (Author/AV)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED148720

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Shirley Engle

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

THE SEARCH FOR A MORE ADEQUATE DEFINITION OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Shirley H. Engle

Indiana University

November, 1977

Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies (Cincinnati, Ohio, November 23-26, 1977)

SO 010 654

I would like to deal briefly with what I see as the most pressing and persistent problem of citizenship education in this country--the lack of a clear idea of what citizenship education is or what it should be about. In the 20 minutes allotted to me I can do little more than suggest the broad outline of my concern in this matter. In doing so, I shall assume that social studies education and citizenship education are one and the same, or, at least, the first is an important contributor to the second. I assume this on the word of two authorative bodies meeting about 50 years apart: the first, the Committee on the Social Studies, which declared in 1916 that, "the constant purpose of the social studies is the cultivation of good citizens," and the second, the NCSS Board of Directors, which stipulated in May 1975 that citizenship education is the focus of social studies education.

Behind the lofty rhetoric of these statements, separated 50 years in time, and despite oceans of words about citizenship education in the meantime, the Ruggs, Dewey, Beard, Hanna, Griffith, Johnson, Metcalf, the Harvard group, and many others, there is about as much confusion today as ever before about the meaning of citizenship education.

A brief foray into the schools, away from the rarified climate of NCSS conventions and college campuses, quickly reveals that just about anything goes as citizenship education. Much of the practice in the field runs at cross purposes with other practice, even in the same school. The practice runs the gamut from crass and mind-shrinking indoctrination, sometimes innocently, sometimes deliberately perpetrated on youngsters, to serious attempts at objectivity and the development of critical capacity and open mindedness. Some practice is more suited to the purposes of a

totalitarian state than to one proclaiming a belief, above all else, in freedom and democracy.

Why, despite our seemingly clear intent, is social studies education in such confusion? The basic problem seems to me to be a lack of clarity and an indecisiveness on our part as professionals, and on the part of the public generally, regarding whether the primary task of citizenship education is to socialize youth or to liberate them. Secondly, we have not sufficiently analyzed these alternatives in relationship to the real needs of our society. Nor have we considered sufficiently the appropriateness of the means we adopt to the task at hand.

Is the good citizen we seek to prepare "good" only in the sense that he has been conditioned to accept the status quo, to live strictly by the rules, to fall obediently into line, to fit into a nitch, to accept unquestioningly all of the conventional orthodoxies of the society, to keep silent no matter what intellectual indignities are perpetrated and, less consequentially, to conform to the conventional styles in clothing, shape of hair, sex, use of drugs, and the like? Is this what citizenship education is all about? Or, is the good citizen we seek one who is always inquiring into matters, who asks good and sometimes enbarrassing questions, who actively involves himself in reforming the society? In short, is the goal of social studies to achieve sometimes troublesome activists?

Many, possibly a majority of parents and teachers, look upon citizenship education as a kind of "breaking in" process as one would break in a horse. They expect children to learn discipline in school. They see good citizenship as consisting primarily of accepting and complying behavior,

which, above all, avoids making trouble. Many of these parents and their teacher allies have carried on a kind of campaign in school against anyone who would break the conventions or question why.

The dichotemy between conformism and activism is not, of course, a perfect one. To some extent, it may even be a false one. There are elements in the status quo that are worth fighting to preserve, such as a basic belief in reason and the democratic ideal of participation and fair play. On the other hand, activism may be either positive or negative in its outcome. It may be the finest expression of a truly free people, or it may be destructive of the common good and counter productive to the ideals sought. We must not allow the possibly negative uses of activism to blind us to its great power for social good. We should never forget that the patriot fathers of our nation, whom we so greatly revere, were radical activists for a cause that we continue to see as right.

There is, however, grave doubt whether children can be "broken in" or "disciplined" as we say today and still become responsible, self-reliant and trustworthy citizen-activists. What youngsters are made to accept mindlessly and without good reason is not likely to form a basis for considered action under the stress of the horrendous problems which are likely to continue to confront our citizenry. Loyalty or patriotism, born out of mindless indoctrination, is all too likely to give way to mindless anddestructive fanaticism of whatever color, ilk, or kind may currently capture the ear. Real patriots are made of sterner stuff than the mere trappings of loyality.

Underlying our failure to come to grips with the problem of definition in citizenship education is a more basic failure to come to grips with the

problems of the society itself. It is becoming painfully obvious that we are beset as a society with grevious problems. Democracy and capitalism, despite their many advantages, are hard pressed to live up to their potential. We are deeply divided as a people over the means for dealing with our problems and for that matter over the reasonable goals of our society. The fact is that many if not all of the institutions of our society are either shattered or in sad disarray. Very few of our institutions, under close scrutiny, would survive exactly as they are today.

Despite these ills and uncertainties, many people in the public and many teachers insist on treating our society as if it were a perfect and finished product, all signed and sealed and explained and ready to deliver to children in a few easy generalizations. The enormous hypocracy of this position is obvious and any child with half a mind is likely to doubt the credibility of those among the public or in schools who pretend there are no problems. In the light of our social conditions, indoctrination, in any form, becomes not only doubtfully effective but hazardous to the future of democracy. Cynical doubt that we can deal with our problems is probably the greatest enemy of all to the healthy future of democracy.

The conditions, which confront our society today, should be taken as an invitation to greater honesty and openness in citizenship education. None of us are certain of the truth. All of us need to share in its exploration. More than ever before we are on our own. This does not mean that we are doomed. Not at all. It could lead to the greatest resurgence of democracy and human well being that the world has ever known. It is possible that democracy will survive only if it is subjected to searching criticism.

In any definition of citizenship education which is consistent with the real problems and potentials of our day, active citizen participation in the search for solutions to our problems will need to be included. The searching question rather than the pat answer must come to characterize citizenship education.

The question of definition of citizenship education has been complicated by the insistence of the profession in equating social studies education with the study of the social sciences. We persist in preparing teachers to deal with citizenship by having them study the social sciences almost exclusively. We persist in basing social studies courses almost exclusively, at least as far down as the middle school, on a few select social science disciplines. In a brilliant article, "Questioning the Place of Social Science in Education," published in Social Education in November of 1967, Fred Newman demonstrated convincingly the inappropriateness and even the counter productivity of the study of social science, standing alone, for the preparation of citizens. Newman's argument, which has been for far too long ignored by the profession, was effectively expanded in a recent and as yet unpublished paper by one of my former students, Wilma S. Longstreet. As Newman and Longstreet point out, the questions with which citizens must deal in real life are far more complex and comprehensive in nature than any with which a social scientist works. In fact, the manner of his work is almost the antithesis of the way a citizen must approach a problem. The social scientist arbitrarily selects a very narrow field of study (only a very small part of the whole of human behavior), which he then isolates from the rest by assuming theoretically that all else remains the same. As long as the social scientist behaves

as a scientist, he is not really concerned with the solutions of broad social problems and their value orientation.

In the world of the citizen, there can be few arbitrary lines drawn. Everything is in continual flux. It cannot be assumed that everything else remains the same for everything is continually changing and new relationships between elements are continually developing. The questions confronting citizens require a synthesis of information only a fraction of which may come from the social sciences. Much must come from their own first hand experience. They must view all information in the light of a multiplicity of values, a matter which social science intentionally ignores. They must confront the very real exigencies of practical politics. In all of this effort at synthesis, social science provides scant assistance.

Furthermore, as Longstreet emphasizes, the citizen must reach closure in his decision making even while the problem is still clothed in a state of great tentativeness. Public and private decisions, if they are to be useful at all, cannot wait until the facts are all in. In stark contrast, social science is never under the gun to act. It can delay decisions forever, if need be. Its concern is not with resolving social problems here and now, but in the more theoretical search for new knowledge.

Further, as Gyrnar Myrdahl pointed out years ago, social science, while holding value questions in abeyance, may become a decided force for conservatism in a society. The social scientist sees his role as describing objectively things as they are. This easily is transformed into a belief in inevitability--that is, things are the only way they could naturally be and, being natural, they are also good. Purported descriptions of reality

come therefore to be taken as orthodoxies. This leads to what Myrdahl described as "A do nothing about it theory of society". A do nothing theory is particularly attractive to the privileged and the powerful because it allows them to keep what they have and to rationalize away imperfections in the society.

Such a theory may serve us badly at a time and in a society caught up in a great period of flux and faced with glaring inconsistencies between its promise and its performance. These may instead be the times for bold action and social experimentation. "Do nothing theories" taught, by implication or innocently through the study of the social sciences, leave out the important possibility, which must be shouldered by the intelligent and socially sensitive citizen in a democracy, that a better world is, indeed, possible and that it may have to be intuitively conceived or dreamed up so to speak. The sciences, which tend to follow rather than set the pace, leave much room for citizen philosophers who dare to dream and value and venture into conceptions of a better world.

The incongruency between the social studies, taken as the study of the social sciences, is compounded by the substitution of subjects based on the social sciences for the genuine study of the social sciences themselves. Not having either the time, the patience or the ability to teach the social sciences genuinely, as Bruner and others would have them taught, we substitute subjects based on the social sciences instead. To justify this switch, we often define the social studies as the social sciences simplified for pedagogical purposes. We do not seem to be aware that this switch changes the impact that the social sciences may have on citizenship education.

Science simply cannot be simplified or summarized without losing its integrity as science. To give a watered down version of a science minus the qualifiers, verifyers and intricate processes involved is to emasculate it as a science. To simplify a science changes the whole mode of its study from the hypothetical, which is its very essence, to the expository. School subjects treat those matters which science holds with great tentativeness as if they were final and orthodox versions of truth. The textbook, which is anathema to true science, is the handmaid- of the school subject. Because textbooks are under great compulsion to cover the subject rather than to treat it in depth, it is almost inevitable that they give a single, oversimple, naieve and frequently distorted version of reality. This is why scholars are regularly incensed by the over-generalizations which appear in textbooks. Furthermore, in the selecting out and boiling down process necessary to bring vast quantities of data within the covers of a single text to be covered in 36 easy lessons, the content becomes loaded with valuations which are implicit and go both unrecognized and unexamined.

While basing citizenship education solely on the study of the social sciences has its limitations, as I have indicated earlier, it could contribute to the teaching of objectivity in the social studies were it not transformed into a set of reduced subjects. The switch to subjects has the effect of turning the social studies into instruments of indoctrination and propaganda. The teaching of economics and political science in the schools are prime examples of what takes place. Textbook interpretation of these subjects, commonly found in schools, bear little relationship either to the real world or to the frontiers of science which usually are years ahead of textbook

versions. Children either are sold a bill of goods, an outdated one at that, or, if they are bright children, they are likely to yawn in our faces at the incredibly biased versions they are spoon fed in school and which they are expected to accept as gospel. This is not only an inadequate but a positively harmful basis for preparing youth to deal with a far from perfect and unfinished world still poorly understood by our best scholars. This is thin fare to prepare one for a world which crys out for new initiatives and the invention of new institutions more responsive to the ideals of democracy and freedom to which we cling as our constant purpose. Citizenship education must be defined as general education, which is value directed and problem oriented and above all objective and forthright.

I reject the idea that socialization should be the main thrust of the social studies. The child gets socialization enough at home, in his church, on the street, and among his peers. The goal of the school should be something quite different, to help the child gain the capacity to think independently about socializing forces. The social studies should deliberately seek to build constructive, activistic attitudes in school children.

I reject the locus of the social studies exclusively in the social sciences. Useful as they are as instruments in the total act of thought, they are inadequate and even counter productive if taken alone. A purpose of social studies education should be that of learning to use the social sciences appropriately in the broader context of social problem solving.

Most of all, I reject the locus of citizenship education in school subjects. Overworking the memory and underemploying the more complex forms of intellectual activity, they sap up precious time, which is sorely needed

by our young for more solid fare. Textbook subjects all too frequently become insiduous instruments of propaganda. They do not provide the tough intellectual and valuational fare which a democracy in peril demands of its citizens.

Is there a model which, while utilizing the social sciences along with many other resources, is of sufficient comprehensiveness and intellectual rigor to serve as the basis for a program of citizenship education? I think there is, and though it has a long tradition and a rich literature, it has been given too scant attention by those developing citizenship education. I refer to the model of social criticism. A careful analysis of what the social critic does, how he goes about sorting out and putting together the whole complex gamut of factors that go into an intelligent and socially responsible decision might well be a new and useful point of departure for building an adequate program of citizenship education. Social criticism is the very foundation of constructive social activism which must be the major goal of citizenship education.